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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the employment situation of 106 Apache youth, of whom 52 had been special education students. All students had exited high school between 1987 and 1992. Findings indicate that 65 percent of the regular education students and 73 percent of special education students were unemployed, that 50 percent of working special education students were receiving below minimum wages (compared to 5 percent of working regular education students), and that the most common reason given for unemployment by both groups was that no job was available. About 14 percent of each group reported that they "did not want a job." Only 33 percent of the youth indicated any unhappiness or dissatisfaction with their employment situation. The paper urges incorporation of transition goals into educational planning, to include Native American cultural values such as active participation in family and tribal life. (DB)

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Post-High School Careers of Apache Special Education and Regular Education Subjects: A Five Year Follow-Up Study

Paper submitted to the American Educational Research Association Conference in Atlanta, Georgia
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Post-High School Careers of Apache Special Education and Regular Education Subjects: A Five Year Follow-Up Study

Transition for individuals with disabilities from school to employment is one of the top priorities of parents, professionals, and policy makers. In the recent past, a number of follow-up studies have focused on the post school adjustment of former special education students (e.g., Hoisch, Karen, & Franzini, 1992; Lichtenstein, 1993; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1993). Major focus in these studies was on the employment status of these high school leavers. Although a variety of follow-up studies have been conducted, there exists a paucity of research regarding the post school careers of Native American youth.

To date, there has been no comprehensive follow-up study to assess the employment situation of Native American youth. This study was conducted to analyze the employment situation of the Apache youth who exited from high school from 1987-92.

Method

Subjects and settings

The sample consisted of 106 former high school students, with and without disabilities, who had graduated or dropped out during the school years 1987-1992. Among the special education students, nearly one-half (46%) were learning disabled, one-fourth emotionally disturbed, and the rest were individuals with mental retardation (17%), and multiple disabilities (12%).

Procedure

Three Native Americans were trained to conduct the interviews. Using the interview questionnaire, these interviewers conducted a face-to-face interview with each former student. To determine reliability, the author filled out a second questionnaire while listening to the interview. The reliability agreement average was 96 percent.

Results

Present Employment

Table 1 presents the current employment situation of the Apache youth.

Insert Table 1 about here

Sixty-nine percent of the total sample were unemployed. Among the special education students who found work, a majority of them worked either as maids/domestics or as janitors, while the general education students worked at higher-skilled jobs such as forestry, construction, and office work.

Table 2 describes the type of work or career these employed Apache youth would prefer to have. As can be seen, while the special education students opted for low skilled and low paid jobs general education students

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Insert Table 2 about here

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wanted office work and computer-related employment.

Reasons for Unemployment

As can be seen in table 3, about half of these youth reported that there were no jobs available on their reservation.

Insert Table 3 about here

Among the unemployed, about 14% in each group reported that they "did not want a job," and 10% of the special education students indicated that their disability was

the reason for their unemployment.

Only two respondents from the entire sample used rehabilitation services. About 20% in each group used Skill Center and Job Corps. Thirty-five percent of the total sample stated that their lives would be improved if they had suitable employment, and another 29% felt that more education would improve their lives.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicated a high unemployment rate in general and an alarmingly high rate for general education students. Despite this dismal employment situation, only 33% of the Apache youth indicated any unhappiness or dissatisfaction with their employment situation. One of the major reasons that transition from school to work has not been fully adopted among Native American communities is that the concepts of competitive employment and independent living are based on the values of an urban Anglo culture. Therefore, these goals may not be relevant to Native Americans, especially those who live on reservations and adhere to traditional ways. However, for these youth, becoming active in tribal life should be an important result of transition. Although employment and independent living may not be culturally valued

transition themes among Native Americans, participating in family chores and in the cultural and spiritual activities and ceremonies within the tribes may appear to be more appropriate. To accomplish these goals, the term transition has to include the family chores and cultural activities to address the cultural beliefs of Native Americans. Only then can IDEA and the way that transition should work be judged according to Native American beliefs, values, and locally defined community standards.

Table 1.

Current Employment Status of Former Students (N=106)

Employment Status	Special Education		Regular Education	
	n	%	n	%
Employed	14	27	19	35
Unemployed	38	73	35	65
Weekly Hours Worked				
Full time	10	71	16	84
21-37 hours	1	7	2	11
Less than 21 hours	3	21	1	5
Wages Received				
Below Minimum Wage	7	50	1	5
Minimum Wage	3	21	6	32
Above Minimum Wage	4	29	12	63

Table 2.

Type of Employment Apache Youth Would Like to Have After High School

Type of Work	Special Education		Regular Education	
	n	%	n	%
Human Services	0	0	0	0
Food Services	1	7	0	0
Janitorial	1	7	1	5
Auto Mechanic	2	14	4	21
Construction	0	0	1	5
Electronics	0	0	1	5
Machine Tools	1	7	0	0
Farming	1	7	0	0
Forestry	1	7	2	11
Computer	1	7	7	37
Office Work	2	14	0	0
Health Care	0	0	1	5
Labor, Other	4	29	2	11

Table 3.

Reasons For Unemployment (n=73)

Reasons	Special Education		Regular Education	
	n	%	n	%
No job available	16	42	17	48
Don't want job	5	13	5	14
Laid off, looking	1	3	3	9
Care for family	1	3	2	6
Pregnant/child care	0	0	3	9
In training, other	6	16	1	3
Unable,heath problem	4	10	0	0
No transportation	1	3	1	3
No response	4	10	3	9

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